

TRAINING PLAN FOR MENTAL HEALTH STAFF TO ASSESS AND INTEGRATE SPIRITUAL INTERESTS OF CLIENTS IN THEIR WELLNESS AND RECOVERY

Purpose

This training plan is designed to enhance the responsiveness of County and contracted mental health staff to the spiritual interests of clients and their wishes to integrate spirituality into their wellness and recovery. The plan will include training on culturally responsive assessment of spiritual interests, case formulation, treatment planning, client care coordination and recovery support.

Background

The California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission has included in its *California Strategic Plan on Reducing Mental Health Stigma and Discrimination* a specific focus on spirituality ("Plan"). The Plan calls for utilizing "spirituality and faith-based practices as tools for wellness and recovery." The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LAC-DMH) is currently engaged in implementing its Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Prevention and Early Intervention Plan taking into account the positive impact spirituality and religion can potentially have on health and mental health, especially in the area of coping with distress such as chronic illness, stress, suffering, and loss. To accomplish this, LAC-DMH has developed a set of practice parameters to guide mental health staff in the assessment and integration of the spiritual interests of clients in their wellness and recovery plan. The implementation of these parameters requires staff to be trained to assess the spiritual interest of mental health clients and integrate as necessary these interests into the clients' therapeutic plans.

Training Objectives

- Educate LAC-DMH staff and contractors on the impact of spirituality on mental health and the role clients' spirituality can play in their wellness and recovery, including definitions and explorations of spirituality, worldviews, mindfulness and religious practices, as they relate to hope, wellness, and recovery.
- Educate LAC-DMH staff and contractors on the diverse spiritual perspectives and worldviews of identified cultural population groups in Los Angeles County and how such perspectives and worldviews may impact these population groups' understanding of mental health, treatment, and recovery. Include discussions of the cultural context, relevance and variations in spirituality and religious practices in local and regional communities.

- Train LAC-DMH staff and contractors to competently assess the spiritual interests of clients based on: a) the clients' understanding of spirituality, b) the diverse cultural views of spirituality, c) the role of spirituality and religion in the life experiences of mental health of clients and families, specifically in maintaining wellness and enhancing recovery, and d) the quality and meaning (essence) of their experiences as they relate to spiritual and mental health practices.
- Train LAC-DMH staff and contractors on adhering to practice boundaries, including the requirement to refrain from proselytizing to clients, and on important clinical and administrative issues related to spiritual and religious aspects of assessment and treatment.
- Utilize didactic and experiential methods in training LAC-DMH staff and contractors to conduct culturally competent therapeutic interactions with clients regarding their spiritual interests.
- Train LAC-DMH staff and contractors to incorporate clients' spiritual interests (including spiritual and religious beliefs and practices) into case formulations, treatment planning, client care coordination plans, and recovery goals.
- Develop a toolkit for assisting clients to engage in self-help activities that allow them to incorporate spirituality into their wellness and recovery, and train LAC-DMH staff and contractors in the use of the toolkit.

Training Strategy

- Develop and implement a training curriculum that identifies basic training for all direct service staff, an intermediate level of training for direct service staff whose scope of practice include conducting clinical assessments, and advanced courses to train select staff whose scope of practice includes conducting clinical assessment to serve as "expert consultants" at each service site/program.
- Ensure direct service managers (District Chiefs and Program Heads) also receive training.
- Ensure training curriculum includes didactic and experiential learning.
- Identify a minimum set of cultural population groups to include in the training on culturally diverse spiritual beliefs and worldviews.
- Ensure "expert consultants" lead regular discussions on the subject of mental health and spirituality among direct service staff.

Curriculum to Enhance Staff Responsiveness

A. Introductory Level (basic training for all direct service staff)

Competency 1: Awareness of the rationale for the Department's efforts in the area of mental health and spirituality, including the development of the parameters. Related learning curriculum will include:

- a. Definition of spirituality adopted by the Department
- b. Literature review on the role of spirituality in mental health
- c. Findings about clients' and families' perspectives from the survey conducted by California Mental Health and Spirituality Initiative
- d. Guidelines and standards
- e. LAC-DMH Mission, Values, and Strategic Plan
- f. Holistic and the other nine aspects of recovery
- g. Eight dimensions of wellness

Competency 2: General awareness of the concept of spirituality, its relationship to religion, its diversity, its role in people's lives, how it affects people's worldview, and how all of this specifically relate to mental health, wellness, and recovery. Related learning curriculum will include:

- a. Definitions of spirituality and religion
- b. Exploration of the diversity of spirituality and worldviews
- c. Exploration of the personal meaning of spirituality
- d. Spiritual dimensions of wellness, recovery and mental health
- e. Mediating factors of the impact spirituality has on mental health

B. Intermediate Level (higher level training for direct service staff whose scope of practice includes conducting clinical assessments)

Competency 3: Conducting culturally competent therapeutic interactions with clients regarding their spiritual interests. Related learning curriculum will include:

- a. Examination of spiritual diversity
- b. Case studies with vignettes
- c. Adhering to practice boundaries
- d. Differentiating the role of direct service staff from that of spiritual advisors/clergy/pastoral counselors.
- e. Provider selection and the non-discrimination clause

Competency 4: Ability to assess the spiritual interests of clients, including spirituality's historical, current and future roles in the clients' life experiences, and spiritual experience and/or practices that mediate the impact of spirituality on mental health. Related learning curriculum will include:

- a. Assessment methodology and tools
- b. Identifying clients' spiritual resources/strengths
- c. Documenting relevant information

- d. Exercising cultural sensitivity and professional values and judgment
- e. Adhering to practice boundaries
- f. Provider selection and the non-discrimination clause

Competency 5: Incorporating clients' spiritual interests in case formulations and in the development of treatment and client care coordination plans. Related learning curriculum will include:

- a. Cultural nuances in case formulations
- b. Differential diagnosis of spiritual and religious problems
- c. Culturally competent recovery plans
- d. Culturally relevant client care coordination plans

C. Advanced Level (advanced courses for staff serving as experts whose scope of practice includes conducting clinical assessments)

Competency 6: Supporting clients' spiritual interests as part of their ongoing wellness and recovery. Related learning curriculum will include:

- a. Interacting with clients' spiritual advisors
- b. Supporting clients who are seeking spiritual advisors or organizations
- c. Assisting clients seeking self-help spiritual practices, such as:
 - Stress Reduction Group through Spirituality, Mindfulness and Meditation¹
- d. Identifying spiritual resources in the community
- e. Adhering to practice boundaries
- f. Addressing spiritual/religious values that conflict with mental health recovery services

Evaluation

Each of the specific trainings delivered to address the identified curriculum requirements will be evaluated per the standard employed by the Department's Training Division.

¹ Based on a curriculum developed by S. Michael Szczerbaty, M.A., MHSC, in LACDMH ASOC.